

Theme: Technology Tomorrow **Text:** Compassion Circuit by John Wyndham (1953) – Extract

There was an inner case of wood pulp, with a snowy layer of wadding under its lid. George rolled it up and pushed it out of the way, and there, ready dressed in black frock and white apron, lay the robot.

They regarded it for some seconds without speaking.

It was remarkably lifelike. For some reason it made Janet feel a little queer to realize that it was her robot — a trifle nervous, and, 5 obscurely, a trifle guilty....

"Sleeping beauty," remarked George, reaching for the instruction book on its chest.

In point of fact the robot was not a beauty. Janet's preference had been observed. It was pleasant and nice-looking without being striking, but the details were good. The deep gold hair quite enviable — although one knew that it was probably threads of plastic with waves that would never come out. The skin — another kind of plastic covering the carefully built-up contours — was 10 distinguishable from real skin only by its perfection.

Janet knelt down beside the box, and ventured a forefinger to touch the flawless complexion. It was quite, quite cold.

She sat back on her heels, looking at it. Just a big doll, she told herself; a contraption, a very wonderful contraption of metal, plastics, and electronic circuits, but still a contraption, and made to look as it did simply because people, including herself, would find it harsh or grotesque if it should look any other way.... And yet, to have it looking as it did was a bit disturbing, too. For one 15 thing, you couldn't go on thinking of it as 'it' any more; whether you liked it or not, your mind thought of it as 'her'. As 'her' it would have to have a name; and, with a name, it would become still more of a person.

Annotations:

1 wood pulp – cellulose material used as a soft filling inside the box with the robot; **wadding** – soft layer of cotton; **lid** – cover of a box **2 frock** – a woman's dress **apron** – it covers the front of your body to protect clothing **4 queer** – strange; **trifle** – a little bit **5 obscure(ly)** – difficult to understand **6 chest** – breast **7 preference** – what you prefer/ like better **8 striking** – extremely good-looking; **enviable** – when you envy sb sth you would also like to have **10 distinguishable** – that can be distinguished because it looks different **11 flawless complexion** – ideal looks (like those of a model) **12 contraption** – piece of machinery

Assignments:

1. Read the text and mark words & passages that you want to use in your answers. Make sure that you do not repeat yourself in doing the following assignments. [10] **2.** Describe in your own words what George and Janet are doing in the above scene. [5] **3.** Take a closer look at words and phrases that Wyndham uses to show how George and Janet see the robot nurse. (Use the words *denotation* and *connotation* in your answer where this makes sense. [15] **4.** Finally things turn out wrong for Janet and George. Who is to blame for what eventually happens? (The more answers you can think of – the better.) [10] **5.** Do some proofreading. [5]